

AUGUST 27 2025 FATHER PETER JAE CHOI

In a home marked by abuse, alcohol, violence, and infidelity, Monica lived an unhappy life. A difficult mother in law and a son who lived a life of debauchery compounded on a problem that was already unbearable for her. She tried to escape her reality by drinking. She tried to numb her pain momentarily through alcohol, but she knew alcohol couldn't solve her problem. So she found hope through her newfound faith in Christ and purpose in her suffering. Monica endured a difficult life, and through her perseverance, she overcame her difficulties and devoted herself to a life of prayer and virtue. As a result, she won over husband, her mother in law, and her son, Augustine. And after 17 long years of prayers, Augustine, too, eventually found Christ and turned his life around and became one of the greatest Saints the church has ever seen! Her patience and perseverance paid off in the end. Monica transformed her home into a home of two saints, St. Monica and St. Augustine.

Forgiveness and perseverance are difficult to achieve. They are probably two of the most difficult tasks we have to accomplish in life. It was difficult for Monica too, but she proved to the world that it is possible. In doing so, St. Monica not only had a profound impact on her son, but she also had a profound impact on the church. She taught us a valuable lesson. Don't give up!

Some years ago, I met Retired Archbishop of Kingston, Jamaica, Donald Reece through a priest friend. I had the pleasure of inviting him to my former parish to do our Lenten Mission. He told us a story about a powerful testimony of forgiveness. One day a lady came by to see him. She was suffering from a husband who was not only abusive to her but cheated on her repeatedly. All hope seemed to have vanished. She didn't know what to do. But she persevered in her prayer. Then one day she had a suspicion that her husband was cheating on her again. So one day she devised a covert operation and followed him. She disguised herself

and carefully followed him so he wouldn't find out. She finally found out. He would visit the same house almost every day. Then one day she waited around the corner from the house her husband visited. She worked up her courage to enter the house. She was shocked to find a young girl who was with her husband's child. The young mother was severely malnourished. She felt bad for her and had compassion for her. So she brought the young mother home with her. She persuaded the mother to give the child to her and also provided money for her to go to a school. Her husband was overwhelmed with her compassion and forgiveness. This brought him to his knees and he cried. Overcome with guilt and gratitude, he told her, "I don't understand. But, if this is what your faith is all about, I want to become Catholic too!" Her forgiveness and compassion had a profound impact on him and it changed him.

In the first reading, St. Paul reminds us that being a disciple means being a disciple of Christ, we can't be a part time Christian. We have to become a full-time Christian, holding nothing back and giving your 100%!

One common thing I find among the people who suffer from alcoholism, or any sort of addictive behaviour, is the result of a deeper and unresolved issue from the past. For Bill Wilson, who is one of the co-founders of Alcoholics Anonymous. He suffered from his parents' separation, a troubled and lonely childhood. These early experiences sowed the seeds of his later struggles with alcohol.

I experienced the same thing in life. My father was abusive to my mother and who was often missing in action. His behaviour made me suffer greatly during my childhood. I started to smoke when I was 14 years old and drinking with friends when I was 16. I wouldn't exactly call myself alcoholic but smoking and drinking, and bad company was how I tried to deal with my problem. And as many others who walked down the same path as me, I knew smoking and drinking couldn't fix my problems. Fast forward to when I was 27 years old. I had just

finished the 3rd year of my seminary formation, and I tried to give up smoking many times. It was a real struggle. The harder I tried the harder I fell. It was a habit I simply could not overcome, no matter how hard I tried.

Then I met someone I knew from the youth group from the Church whom I knew smoked for many years. I found out he quit smoking. Out of curiosity I asked him how he was able to quit. He asked me, “Are you serious about quitting?” I said, “I think so.” With a gentle smile he replied, “I don’t think you are serious enough. Come back when you’re really serious.” His response stunned me and I stood there thinking to myself, ‘Am I really serious? Maybe part of me wants to quit but part of me doesn’t.’ I let it go and walked away.

Some months later I approached him again and this time I told him. “I made up my mind. I am serious about quitting smoking cigarettes. Can you tell me how you quit?” He replied, “Pray!” When I heard him say, pray, I immediately burst into laughter. “How is prayer going to help me quit?” I asked. He just shrugged his shoulders and he walked away. I went back to the seminary thinking all night about what he said. I couldn’t sleep that night. For the next several days in the usual fashion I tried to quit and again and again I made the resolution to quit at night telling myself, “This will be my last cigarette,” only to pick it up the next day. Then one day, out of frustration I went down to the chapel and I knelt and prayed, “God! I tried to quit over and over again, and I can’t do it on my own! Can you help me!” It was at that moment when I fell to my knees and came to a realization that I couldn’t do it on my own that I realized, ‘this is what my friend meant!’ That day my prayer changed, I told God, “Lord, I give up! Now, you’re in charge! I am neither going to rely on myself nor trust myself. You need to help me, because I am going to rely on you!” From that day each time I had an urge to smoke I prayed. The urge didn’t go away, but I’ve learned to lean on God. And that was enough for me to quit. The truth is we are all on our healing

journey. We can't overcome difficulties and things we have an addiction to. But with the help of God, we will!